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AIR COMMAND AND STAFF COLLEGE

AIR UNIVERSITY

OPERATIONALIZING INTELLIGENCE

IN IRREGULAR WARFARE

by

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A Research Report to the Faculty

In Partial Fulfillment of Graduation Requirements

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Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama

March 2010

Disclaimer

Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance – Operational Perspectives for the Warfighter Research Paper

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Abstract

The early phases of fighting GWOT required a counterterrorism strategy that relied predominantly on direct action, but this is not sufficient to win GWOT. Winning GWOT requires a counterinsurgency strategy, requiring a preponderance of effort on indirect action. These different strategies have very different intelligence requirements especially at the tactical level of war. This paper aims to identify these different requirements and recommend initiatives to further operationalize intelligence.

Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance – Operational Perspectives for the Warfighter Research Paper

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Fighting and winning the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) are distinct endeavors. Fighting the GWOT is principally a counterterrorism effort that requires direct action to kill or capture terrorists and destroy their support networks. Can a counterterrorism strategy alone win GWOT? While direct action is certainly the strength of the military, it is insufficient to win the GWOT. Winning GWOT requires the elimination of the environment that enables terrorists to recruit, train, plan and operate. In order to accomplish this, the Department of Defense must conduct counterinsurgency (COIN) operations that require greater reliance on indirect actions to influence populations. Counterterrorism and counterinsurgency operations have different intelligence requirements. The Intelligence Community must continue evolving capabilities and processes in order to provide collectors, analysts, planners and operators that will efficiently integrate intelligence in support of the complete range of irregular warfare operations.

Prior to discussing this topic further, it is critical to clarify some of the terms used throughout this document. Intelligence in this paper refers to the entire Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) enterprise and includes tasking, collection, processing, exploitation and dissemination. The term intelligence is also used at times to refer to the products of these processes. Operationalizing intelligence refers to the integration and synchronization of intelligence into operations, not to be confused with fusion of intelligence at the operational level of war. The goal is to further consider how intelligence can be more effective at the tactical level of warfare, specifically in Irregular Warfare (IW). IW is doctrinally defined as a violent struggle among state and non-state actors for legitimacy and influence over the relevant population.[1] This paper concentrate on Air Force and Special Operations Forces (SOF) experiences in Afghanistan and Iraq and so focuses on counterterrorism and COIN and excludes support for insurgencies, which falls under the broader definition of IW.

In recent years, a paradigm shift has moved intelligence from bring a support function of operations to the point that the new mantra of 'Intelligence *is* operations' is widely accepted. While this may be true, there is certainly room to make intelligence more operationally relevant and effective. "Effective… intelligence results when actionable information derived from a detailed understanding of adversary systems, capabilities and intentions is delivered in time to make germane planning and operational decisions on how, when and where to engage enemy forces."[2] Based upon this measure of effectiveness it is clear that the goal of intelligence is not to simply gain information superiority, but to put the information to use to gain decision superiority and ultimately a tactical advantage.

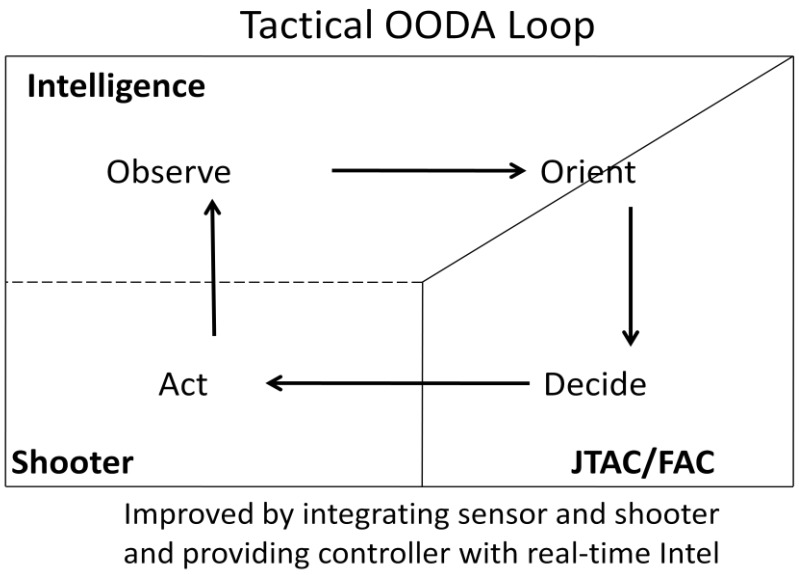
The early stages of the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan consisted primarily of counterterrorism operations. These operations required a priority of effort on direct action missions to destroy terrorist networks. To determine how critical intelligence is during these operations, simply look at the kill chain. The 'find, fix, track, target, engage and assess' model requires intelligence for at least two thirds of these actions, and arguably all six. Given this reliance, the intelligence professional must bring some fundamental knowledge to the fight. He must understand the capabilities and limitations of all available ISR systems available, in order to know what products to ask for. He must also be able to articulate IW concepts and doctrine while remaining adaptive to changing enemy tactics. Finally, he must understand the requirements of his warfighting partners. For instance, "the difference between special operations and conventional operations lies in the degree… of dependence on detailed operational intelligence."[3]

The first initiative to operationalize intelligence during counterterrorism operations that has worked well and should be expanded is to push intelligence professionals forward by

imbedding them into tactical units. Air Force IW doctrine identifies the need to push intelligence to the lowest level as the best way to improve tactical situational awareness by stating, "Timely, accurate and relevant intelligence should be gathered and analyzed at the lowest possible level and disseminated throughout the force."[4] Given today's technologies, the imbedded intelligence operator can maintain unprecedented situational awareness through reachback to multiple information centers. This places the realistic expectation that intelligence products can be assimilated, synthesized and delivered to the warfighter quicker.

The second initiative to operationalize intelligence for counterterrorism operations is the merging of sensor and shooter and the introduction of Non-Traditional ISR (NTISR). The Deputy Chief of Staff for ISR, Lt Gen Deptula noted, "Increasingly, aircraft normally associated with strike operations have excellent sensors on board, and in many cases their sensor data can be networked to others who can turn it into actionable intelligence."[5] The most notable example of combining the hunter and killer is the extensive use of armed unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs). These aircraft provide real-time full motion video (FMV) directly to ground troops for immediate action as well as sending the video to Distributed Common Ground Stations (DCGS) for further exploitation. These aircraft are also loaded with armaments for immediate engagement if the situation dictates. Armed UAVs are not the only platforms combining sensor and shooter capabilities. NTISR systems that utilize advanced targeting pods are being fitted to manned ground attack aircraft that also provide FMV to ground forces equipped with a Remotely Operated Video Enhancement Receiver (ROVER). Using the ROVER feed, a Joint Terminal Attack Controller (JTAC) can direct a precision strike guided by laser or Global Positioning System.[6] In addition to the highly accurate guidance systems, the JTAC has alternate weaponeering solutions available thanks to cockpit-selectable fuzing options and munitions of

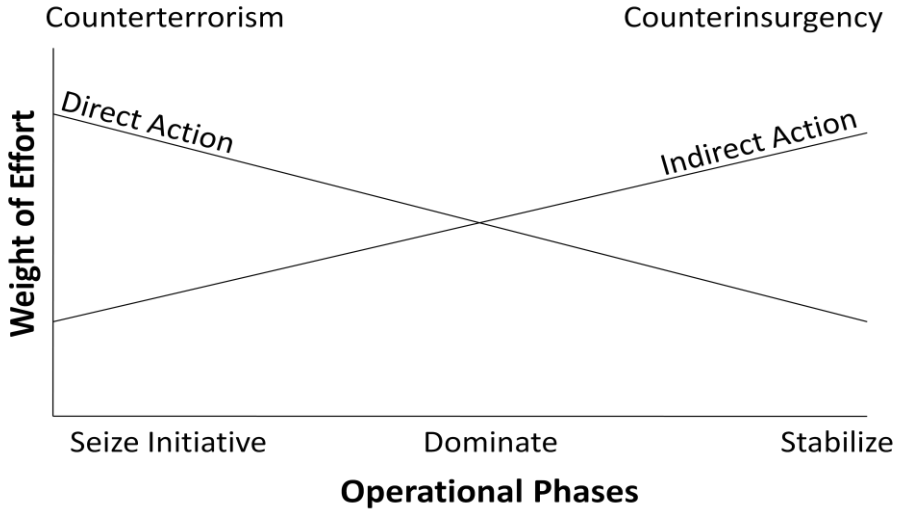
various explosive yields that allow for a tailored delivery of intended effects while limiting unintended effects.[7] The following diagram depicts how the integration of sensor and shooter contributes to decision superiority by decreasing the time needed to complete the Observe, Orient, Decide, Act (OODA) loop. The decision cycle excels by providing the JTAC with real-time intelligence that aids in target designation as well as providing weapons that are immediately available to deliver the required kinetic effects.



Another way of operationalizing intelligence is to provide warfighters with intuitive intelligence products. Intelligence products are becoming inherently useful to operators without the need for specialized analysis. FMV has become one of the most popular intelligence products since it provides outstanding situational awareness in real time in its raw form. Annotated graphics are also making their way into the hands of tactical units prior to mission execution in large part due to the improvements in data transmission and expedited exploitation. These annotated graphics provide a common reference for everyone involved in an operation. In addition to keeping it simple, intelligence has benefitted from automated processes that render complex data in ways that are discernable without specialized analysis or interpretation.[8]

Moving Target Indicator (MTI) is an example of automation assisting in the rapid production of useful intelligence. MTI uses radar data to characterize ground targets and then displays them graphically. One potential danger of allowing operators to make their own analysis of these intuitive products is that they may become easily deceived. An individual could see what looks like a tank on their FMV, but does it have the correct IR signature or how does it appear on MTI. Since this could be a decoy, intelligence must be integrated and synchronized across multiple sensors.

A counterterrorism strategy alone has proved ineffective in winning GWOT. In both Iraq and Afghanistan, as the operations matured, the weight of effort transitioned to COIN operations. Direct action is still required to provide force protection and defend strategic interests but greater emphasis is placed on winning popular support for the legitimate government. In this dilemma, "the military finds itself in a balancing act in COIN operations trying to win over the local noncombatant population, the true center of gravity for this type of warfare, while simultaneously defeating the insurgents."[9] The transition from direct action-dominated counterterrorism operations into COIN operations that require more indirect action missions is shown in the diagram below.



One reason that IW campaigns cannot be won through direct action alone is best described in Kilcullen's book, *The Accidental Guerilla*. He suggests that the use of excessive force results in unintended collateral damage which can be used by insurgents to rally local opposition to the government and recruit additional people into the insurgency.[10] Since counterterrorism efforts ultimately strengthen the insurgency and undermine the legitimacy of the government, direct action must be used very judiciously in a COIN environment.

Another reason that counterterrorism operations are insufficient to win GWOT is that they fail to counter the ideology of the radicalized population. The ideology that best addresses the cultural, social, political and economic issues of the population will gain their support and ultimately claim victory. COIN calls for a different strategy that relies heavily upon non-kinetic operations. These indirect actions have distinctly different intelligence requirements from those needed for counterterrorism. Providing actionable intelligence in COIN is challenging. "The ability to hide among the population, the tactics employed and the distributed nature of insurgent organizations make finding, identifying and engaging targets difficult."[11] Even the flow of information is different in COIN. In a counterterrorism operation, intelligence flows into the tactical unit from multiple sources, however in COIN the tactical units become the source of intelligence for all higher echelons. Maj Gen Flynn states, " 'All COIN is local.' In COIN, the flow is (or should be) reversed. The soldier…on the ground is usually the person best informed about the environment and the enemy."[12]

The role of intelligence in COIN is no less significant; albeit more difficult. Finding and fixing targets for COIN operations is challenging because insurgent organizations do not typically have a rigid structure, unit sizes vary and are usually compartmented from one another. Their tactics are very adaptive and they use available resources. "The enemy is a low-contrast

foe easily camouflaged among civilian clutter, unlike high-contrast targets such as airfields and warships."[13]

A COIN strategy relies heavily on non-kinetic options including information operations. Operationalized intelligence must be culturally attuned to be effectively employed in this environment. For information operations to be successful, it is not sufficient to know about the people in general, intelligence professionals must understand the nuances of each particular tribe or clan. Additionally, intelligence can have a positive impact on influence operations by identifying opportunities to provide humanitarian assistance, medical support or otherwise improve the quality of life for the populace, especially if it directly affects village or tribal leaders.

Another method for intelligence to make contributions in COIN is in support of the legitimacy of the supported government. One of the key missions that improve host government legitimacy is Foreign Internal Defense (FID). Intelligence directly contributes to FID by teaching host nation personnel on releasable collection and exploitation techniques. Intelligence must also make every effort to provide releasable intelligence products that SOF can share with the partner country Special Forces. "While it can be appreciated that intelligence sources and sensitive technology may have to be protected, assigning coalition allies high-risk conventional or SOF missions without providing critical all-source intelligence along with the assigned target package is arguably immoral and particularly disenfranchising."[14]

Operationalizing intelligence in COIN requires an even greater degree of ISR synchronizing than most other operations. Airborne ISR assets are invaluable for their persistence and ability to find, fix and track an enemy in a low-contrast environment. However, in a low-contrast environment FMV and certain Signals Intelligence (SIGINT) sensors have a

narrow field of view. These sensors require cueing from another source such as Human Intelligence (HUMINT) or wide area SIGINT sensors. When blending all these sources together, SIGINT might locate a target but not be able to identify who it is. FMV could be used to track the target but not sufficient to provide positive identification. HUMINT sources may provide intent but not be able to fix the target's exact location.[15] By synchronizing all these disciplines, the result is actionable intelligence.

The early phases of fighting GWOT required a counterterrorism strategy that relied predominantly on direct action to destroy terrorist networks. Operationalizing intelligence under a counterterrorism strategy means imbedding intelligence professionals directly into tactical units. Efforts to further combine sensor and shooter platforms will continue to shorten the kill chain for improved mission effectiveness. Delivering intuitive intelligence products also contributes to operationalizing intelligence for direct action missions. A counterterrorism strategy alone is insufficient to win GWOT because unintended collateral damage from kinetic strikes alienates the populace and serves the insurgency with a recruiting tool. In addition, these kinetic strikes are ineffective at affecting the battle against radical ideologies. Finally, operationalizing intelligence under a COIN strategy requires a different focus. COIN campaigns require an even greater degree of cultural acuity for the local population, the ability to share intelligence products and techniques in support of FID, and the ability to synchronize multi-source intelligence.

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[1] JP 1-02, *Department of Defense Dictionary*, 282
[2] AFDD 1, *Airforce Basic Doctrine*, 54
[3] JP 3-05, *Doctrine for Joint Special Operations,* I-1
[4] AFDD 2-3, *Irregular Warfare*, 17
[5] Deptula, *A House Divided*, 9
[6] Peck, *Airpower's Crucial Role in Irregular Warfare,* 11
[7] Ibid, 13
[8] Deptula, *A House Divided*, 9

[9] Haendchke, *Adding Less-Lethal Arrows,* 37
[10] Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla*
[11] AFDD 2-3, *Irregular Warfare*, 8
[12] Flynn, *Fixing Intel,* 12
[13] Luttwak, *Dead End,* 36
[14] Taillon, *Hitting the Ground with Coalition SOF,* 29
[15] Flynn, *Employing ISR: SOF Best Practices,* 57

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